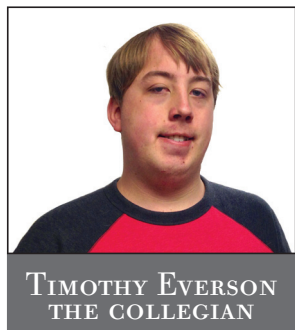


## Oklahoma will win Big 12 championship due to better matchups down the stretch



PARKER ROBB | THE COLLEGIAN

Oklahoma guard **Buddy Hield** puts up a floater above freshman guard **Marcus Foster** during the second half of the Wildcats' 72-66 victory over No. 25 Oklahoma Sooners Jan. 14, 2014, in Bramlage Coliseum.

TIMOTHY EVERSON  
THE COLLEGIAN

with either Kansas State or Iowa State, Kansas and anyone on their side of the bracket has the toughest schedule leading up to the championship game.

Meanwhile on the flip side of the bracket, the games — while still very intriguing — are far less daunting. No. 2 seed Oklahoma will meet Baylor (sorry TCU), and Texas will take on the Mountaineers of West Virginia.

Only one of the top five seeds are coming in with any momentum and that's Oklahoma. The Sooners are the only team in the top five in the Big 12 standings to win their last three games leading into the tournament. The four others have all dropped two of their last three, respectively.

Oklahoma has one of the most potent offenses in the country led by sophomore guard Buddy Hield. Averaging 16.8 per game, the sophomore from the Bahamas has become an elite Big 12 guard. Senior

forward Cameron Clark has also proven to be a match-up nightmare who averages 15.2 per game and 5.6 rebounds.

For their first game in the second round, Oklahoma will take on the winner of the Baylor vs. TCU matchup. Considering the Horned Frogs are 0-18 in Big 12 competition this year, it might be safe to assume that Baylor wins that one. The Sooners have an unappreciated center in sophomore Ryan Spangler and Clark to bang around with the likes of Baylor senior forward Corey Jefferson and sophomore center Isaiah Austin. Oklahoma also has the guard play to keep up with the scoring clip of senior Brady Heslip and junior Kenny Chery.

However, the Sooners swept Baylor in the regular season, so let's assume they sweep them in the tournament too. After that, they would meet up with either Texas or West Virginia. Both Oklahoma and TV producers would most likely rather see a rematch of the Red River Shootout then see an Oklahoma-West Virginia matchup. Oklahoma swept Texas and junior forward Jonathan Holmes during the season and seem to have their number, while the Sooners lost a close one in overtime to West Virginia head coach Bob Huggins' squad.

West Virginia is a team who can be very dangerous and will be extremely hungry to make a deep run in the Big 12 tournament so it can make it's way into the NCAA tournament. If Oklahoma doesn't bring their A-game, chances are, the Mountaineers' will be going to the championship.

Assuming that Oklahoma does top either the Longhorns or the Mountaineers, that still leaves that elusive team from the left side of the bracket. It could be anyone. Oklahoma has beaten every team on that side of the bracket at least once, excluding Kansas. That's their bugaboo. If the Jayhawks makes it to the championship game, even without Joel Embiid, that would mean that they found someone to step up and fill that gap. But, no matter who Kansas plays leading up to the game, you would think they may be worn out come Saturday.

Both regular season losses were close, both by less than 10 points. Oklahoma will have the fresher legs and lust for revenge. Head coach Lon Kruger's Sooners could walk away with the trophy.

Timothy Everson is a sophomore in pre-journalism. Please send comments to [sports@kstatecollegian.com](mailto:sports@kstatecollegian.com).

## Kansas talented enough to prevail in Big 12 championship without Embiid

AUSTIN EARL  
THE COLLEGIAN

The Kansas Jayhawks have enough talent to win their second straight Big 12 tournament. With stars like freshman Andrew Wiggins and sophomore Perry Ellis, there is reason to believe that they will raise another trophy this Saturday. While freshman sensation Joel Embiid has been a large part of the Jayhawks' success, they can still win without him.

In six of the last eight Big 12 Tournaments, Kansas has finished on top. Their dominance over the Big 12 is something rivaled by very few schools throughout the country. This year is the toughest the field has been in a long time, but the Jayhawks have a lot of weapons.

Kansas' best weapon is Big 12 Freshman of the Year, Wiggins. He leads the Jayhawks in scoring with 16.8 points per game. His last game was his best, where he scored 41 points in a loss to West Virginia. In some people's eyes, Wiggins has not lived up to the hype that was built around him — but he has been a very solid player for his team.

Another one of Kansas' scorers is Ellis. While he has not played incredibly well on defense this season, his production on the offensive end has made up for it. He averages 13.2 points per game, but has been inconsistent. Against TCU he scored 32 points, but in his next game against Texas Tech he only scored four. If the Jayhawks get good point production from Ellis in the Big 12 tournament, they will be hard to beat.

Even with the great players that are on head coach Bill Self's squad, it will not entirely make up for the loss of the Big 12 Defensive Player of the Year, Embiid. However, the Jayhawks have enough talent to suffice.

The Jayhawks have won games this season with their offense, scoring the 24th most points per game in the country. Embiid contributed an average of 11.2 points to the team each game. That



EMILY DESHAZER | THE COLLEGIAN

Senior guard **Shane Southwell** defends Kansas sophomore forward **Perry Ellis** on Feb. 10 at Bramlage Coliseum. With freshman Joel Embiid out, Ellis and other Kansas players will have to step up if they want to win the Big 12 championship tournament.

production can be made up elsewhere. Kansas will be able to score on teams in this tournament, just as they did throughout Big 12 play.

The 7-foot presence of Embiid will be missed in the Jayhawks' defense. The strength of most Big 12 teams is on the perimeter. The top teams are led by guards and small forwards. The Jayhawks have very athletic players at those positions, such as Wiggins. Forwards senior Tarik Black and sophomore Jamari Traylor must provide some sort of deterrent for guards who slash into the lane. If they can do that, defense will not be a big issue for Kansas.

Another team to look out for in the Big 12 tournament is the Oklahoma State Cowboys. The Cowboys are a very talented team that is starting to find their stride; they learned how to play without sophomore Marcus Smart during his suspension, and now that he is back they are playing very well. Oklahoma State has won four out of their last five games, with the only loss coming in a thriller in Ames, Iowa against Iowa State.

Austin Earl is a freshman in pre-journalism. Please send comments to [sports@kstatecollegian.com](mailto:sports@kstatecollegian.com).

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## TOURNAMENT TIPOFF

Thursday, 11:30 a.m. Sprint Center



PARKER ROBB | THE COLLEGIAN

Senior guard **Shane Southwell** hits one of his four 3-pointers in the first half of K-State's 80-73 defeat of Iowa State March 1 in Bramlage Coliseum. Southwell led the Wildcats in scoring with a total of 13 points.

## K-State to play Iowa State Thursday in Kansas City

By JOHN ZETMEIR  
THE COLLEGIAN

Last season, the K-State Wildcats made it all the way to the championship game in the Phillips 66 Big 12 Championship in Kansas City, Mo. If they hope to return, they will first have to go through the Iowa State Cyclones. This will be the rubber match between the two teams who have had similar Big 12 seasons.

"It's going to be a great game, I'm confident in that," Iowa State head coach Fred Hoiberg said Monday on the Big 12 coaches teleconference. "Both teams won on their home court. We played a very physical game in Manhattan."

The last time the Wildcats (20-11, 10-8 Big 12) won a game, it was against the Iowa State Cyclones (23-7, 11-7 Big 12). K-

State had one of their more complete team performances in their last game against Iowa State. Senior forward Shane Southwell led the Wildcats with 13 points, hitting four of six attempts from long range.

"When we win, we're a good team," K-State head coach Bruce Weber said Monday. "When we beat Iowa State, we had five guys in double-digits, we had a couple with nine or eight. We had 10 guys produce and that didn't happen Saturday."

For the Cyclones, seniors DeAndre Kane and Melvin Ejim have both been named to the Big 12 All-First team. Ejim was named Big 12 player of the year, while Kane was named Big 12 Newcomer of the Year. They are the two main scoring threats for the Cyclones. In the last matchup, the two seniors combined to score 54 of the Cyclones 73 points.

As it has all season, the

Wildcats' success on Thursday may be determined by freshman guard Marcus Foster's ability to get the ball in the hoop. The freshman, who was just named a second team all-Big 12 selection, leads K-State in scoring. Foster is averaging 15.4 points per game this season against the Cyclones.

The Wildcats have struggled away from Bramlage Coliseum this season. However, the trip to the Sprint Center isn't exactly another road game for the Wildcats. In fact, because of the short two-hour drive from Manhattan to Kansas City, there should be plenty of purple clad fans in the stands to cheer on the Wildcats. So despite a 2-7 road record in Big 12 play this season, the Wildcats should be able to find comfort at the Sprint Center.

The Wildcats and Cyclones will play the first game of the day on Thursday. Tipoff is set for 11:30 a.m.

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PARKER ROBB | THE COLLEGIAN  
Oklahoma State guard **Marcus Smart** attempts a last-effort jump shot in the final seconds of the Cowboys' 74-71 upset loss to the Wildcats in Bramlage Coliseum Jan. 4.

By TATE STEINLAGE  
THE COLLEGIAN

# 7

Kansas is vying for its seventh conference tournament title in a decade

The “decade of dominance,” as its known throughout Lawrence, has been just that — dominance. Kansas has won six conference tournament titles in the last nine years, and that’s not even the most impressive statistic. In those six victories, the Jayhawks have won by an average of 11 points, the closest game being a 2008 matchup against Kevin Durant and the Texas Longhorns.

Head coach Bill Self and company will once again be the No. 1 seed at the tournament, as they try to put a bow on one of the most impressive streaks in college basketball history.

# 19.8

Oklahoma State sophomore guard **Marcus Smart**’s points per game average since returning from a three-game suspension

Smart’s antics with a fan down in Lubbock, Texas were viewed as, well, not his last name. However, the sophomore standout has

## By the numbers: Phillips 66 Big 12 Championship tournament

been magnificent since returning to the team from his three-game suspension. The guard’s “worst” performance during this stretch of play was a 16-point effort at home against Texas Tech.

With the Cowboys sitting on the NCAA Tournament selection committee’s bubble, Smart will need to have a big week in Kansas City to keep Oklahoma State rolling on through March.

# 21

The jersey number of Kansas freshman center **Joel Embiid**, who will be sidelined for the tournament

The 7-footer has been nothing less than spectacular for the Jayhawks all season. More than 11 points, eight rebounds, and two blocks per game has rightfully granted Embiid the praise of the college basketball world, and the admiration of a few dozen NBA scouts.

However, Embiid re-injured his back against Oklahoma State on March 1, making him miss the Jayhawks’ final two regular season games. Self originally told the Kansas media that his center would return for the conference tournament, but that has since been retracted — Embiid is expected to miss the week’s action.

Sophomore forward Perry Ellis and senior forward Tarik Black will be the targeted players that will have to step up if the Jayhawks want to put another conference trophy on their shelves.

# 2002

Last time Oklahoma won the conference tournament as a number two seed

Sooner Hollis Price was the Big 12 Tournament’s Most Outstanding Player in 2002 when Oklahoma won the title over number one seed Kansas at Kemper Arena in Kansas City, Mo.

This year, Oklahoma returns to the tournament a No. 2 seed, this time under third-year head coach — and Silver Lake, Kan. native — Lon Kruger. Interestingly enough, the Jayhawks are the No. 1 seed as well. Can history repeat itself 12 years later?

## Ejim, Smart headline Big 12 players to watch in Kansas City



Emily DeShazer | THE COLLEGIAN  
Junior forward **Thomas Gipson** and Kansas forward **Tarik Black** fight for the overtime tipoff on Feb. 10 at Bramlage Coliseum.

Iowa State senior forward **Melvin Ejim**

Oklahoma State sophomore guard **Marcus Smart**

Ejim has been everything and more for the Cyclones this season. Head coach Fred Hoiberg likes to run and gun, which allows many different players to score for Iowa State. However, there is no denying that Ejim has been the anchor for his team. The senior from Canada has been named the 2014 Big 12 player of the year after finishing the regular season ranking second in the Big 12 in both scoring and rebounds. Ejim averaged 18.2 points and 8.6 rebounds per game. The senior’s best performance of the year came against TCU where he scored a Big 12 record 48 points and grabbed 18 rebounds. The Cyclones will play K-State in their first game of the tournament, and will need Ejim to play at a high level if they plan to win three games at

the Sprint Center.

Oklahoma State sophomore guard **Marcus Smart**

If you follow college basketball, Smart’s name is probably one that you’ve heard before. He is famous for his antics as well as his play, but since returning from his three game suspension, Smart has carried the Cowboys far. Oklahoma State heads into Kansas City as winners of four of their last five games. In those last five games, Smart is averaging 19.8 points, 5.2 rebounds and 6.4 assists. The Cowboys were one of the favorites to win the Big 12 regular season title this season, but simply could not find much success during the regular season. With Oklahoma State playing their best basketball of the season headed into the tournament, they could show that despite their sluggish regular sea-

son, they are capable of making an NCAA tournament run.

West Virginia junior guard **Juan Staten**

The West Virginia Mountaineers are still fighting for their opportunity to play in the NCAA tournament. A big reason for that has been the play Staten this season. The junior finished the regular season having led the Big 12 in both points and assists this season, and averaged 18.4 points and 5.9 assists. West Virginia is 17-14 this season and 9-9 in conference play. If Staten can will his team to a strong Big 12 tournament performance, it’s hard to not pencil West Virginia into the NCAA tournament.

Kansas senior forward **Tarik Black**

You might be thinking, “Why should we keep our eyes



PARKER ROBB | THE COLLEGIAN  
Iowa State forward **Melvin Ejim** surges toward the basket as he attempts to ploy through the wall formed by junior forward **Nino Williams** and senior guard **Will Spradling** in the first half of K-State’s 80-73 defeat of Iowa State March 1 in Bramlage Coliseum. Ejim led the Cyclones with 30 points.

out for a guy who averages less than five points and five rebounds a game?” Well, Black must now step up for the Jayhawks with freshman center Joel Embiid out with a back injury. Though Black has only been asked to play about 12 minutes a game during his lone season with

Kansas, if the Jayhawks want to repeat as conference tournament champions, they will need Black to play well in Embiid’s stead.

John Zetmeir is a junior in mass communications. Please send comments to [sports@kstatecollegian.com](mailto:sports@kstatecollegian.com).

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